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**Eat, Drink, and be Moderate**

The holidays are upon us. That means that throughout the next month, you are going to be tempted to eat all kinds of delicious foods that are as rich in calories and fat as they are in taste. So, what can you do this holiday season to keep your eating habits in check?

First of all, be realistic. "Instead of trying to lose weight at this time of year, focus on maintaining your current weight and avoiding weight gain," says Toby Smithson, RD, LD, a Community Dietitian for the Lake County Health Department/Community Health Center and a media spokesperson for the Illinois Dietetic Association. "This can be quite an accomplishment during the holiday season as we are continuously bombarded from November to January with all of our holiday favorites. After the holidays may be a better time to shift your focus back to weight loss."

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Smithson recommends taking this time to enjoy family and friends and enjoy special holiday foods. “It’s important to allow yourself to enjoy your favorite holiday foods and not feel guilty,” she said. “Allowing yourself to feel guilty or deprived can take a toll on the good eating habits that you have developed throughout the year.”

As you enjoy those favorite holiday treats that may be higher in calories and fat, remember the key is moderation and balance. All foods can fit into a balanced eating plan as long as the higher calorie and fat options are used in moderation. Also, don’t be a victim of portion distortion. When dining at restaurants or eating from buffet tables, it is easy to eat much more than just one portion of food. If portions are too large, save some to eat at home at a later time.

To combat the extra calories and fat you may be adding from those endless holiday parties, remember to focus on making healthy choices between all of the festivities. If you will be enjoying an evening party, try choosing lighter, balanced meals and smaller portions earlier in the day. This will allow you to enjoy your holiday favorites without going overboard on calories.

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Continuing to include physical activity throughout the holidays is also important to help manage holiday eating. Don't let the holidays get in the way of the exercise routine you have worked so hard on to maintain all year. What are some ways to stay active when your schedule is full of last minute shopping, planning for parties and travel? "Try walking a few extra laps around the mall before you start your shopping, put on some holiday music and dance with your friends or family, or simply park a little farther away at the crowded shopping malls." said Smithson. "These are all simple ways to squeeze daily activity into a busy holiday schedule."

Extra calories are just one of the reasons we need to include physical activity into our daily routine. As the parties and food come with the holidays, so does added stress. This stress can be a trigger for extra eating, specifically of high calorie foods. Using physical activity to manage stress can also help to combat emotional eating. Keeping balance and moderation in eating and continuing physical activity will lead us to a healthier New Year.

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